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UNITED STATES PERCEPTIONS OF SOVIET TACTICS VERSUS CONTEMPORARY--ETC(U)

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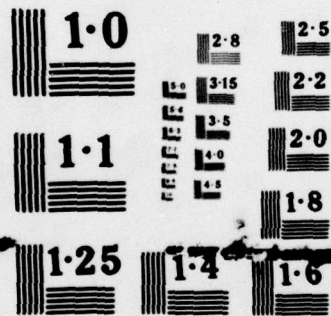


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STUDENT RESEARCH REPORT

CPT. FREDERICK R. WILSON
U.S. PERCEPTIONS OF SOVIET TACTICS
VERSUS CONTEMPORARY
SOVIET TACTICAL WRITINGS
-1979-

GARMISCH, GERMANY

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F O R E W O R D

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DIRECTORATE FOR FREEDOM OF INFORMATION
AND SECURITY REVIEW (OASD-PA)
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

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U.S. Perceptions of Soviet Tactics
versus
Contemporary Soviet Tactical Writings

⑨ Student research rept.

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Summary

↘ The author of this study compared two years of Soviet military periodicals on tactics with recent US Army publications on Soviet tactics. The purpose was to discover any discrepancies between the two. He found that in general US publications correctly reported Soviet tactical doctrine. However, several key areas of Soviet doctrine were not emphasized sufficiently in US sources. Key among these were the role of reconnaissance and the flexibility of the Soviet attack.

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Introduction

This study was undertaken to find if the current United States Army publications on the tactics of the Soviet Army are a true reflection of those tactics. This study examined two years of Soviet periodical literature, 1977 and 1978, and compared what was found in that literature with published studies produced by the US Army.

There were also three ancillary areas which this study sought to address: first, during the examination of the Soviet literature, determine if that literature was directed at the Soviet soldier; second, determine if the Soviet periodical literature could be beneficial to the US analyst in presenting a comprehensive picture of current Soviet tactics; and third, review the two years of periodical literature for new developments in Soviet tactics which have not been currently identified.

The methodology of the study is not void of systemic problems, nor does it necessarily represent the best method to pursue a thorough understanding of Soviet tactics. However, these qualifiers aside, it does allow the observer to view Soviet tactics without the misperceptions held by any one Western writer or any one Soviet writer, because a broad range of Soviet authors' articles are reviewed.

The first problem that the study uncovered was that single articles do not present a complete picture of Soviet tactics. The articles are written about one exercise, or one tactical situation, which is dependent upon the conditions which the author established. The next article, while it may be on the same subject, will frequently present the reader with a different set of conclusions. This occurs because the different authors write their articles with a limited aim. They focus their attention upon only those aspects of the tactical problem which support their theme.

The second problem with the methodology of this study is that Soviet periodical literature deals with tactics only at battalion level and below, creating special considerations that the reader must be aware of when making an evaluation of the literature. Because the literature deals with battalion level and below only, any conclusions about the tactics of higher level units are tentative at best. The picture of battle at lower levels is relatively constant. The problems of battalion and company commanders tend to revolve around management of people, equipment, and those housekeeping functions required to maintain an organization. The timeless elements of terrain, weather, mission, personnel, and equipment certainly change, but the degree of change for individual small unit commanders is a slow process and the articles written by these people for publication generally reflect an evolutionary,

rather than revolutionary change in tactics. Therefore, confirmation of radical change found in classified or unclassified sources written by military strategists at higher levels might not be found for years in periodical literature.

The third problem with the methodology is the time span of the study. Two years of the periodical literature may not be a sufficient base for analysis. Soviet doctrine could be undergoing change at the higher levels of military thought, but not be reflected in the articles. The process of introducing a new tactical doctrine might well take place over five or more years, therefore the conclusions based on only two years could lead the reader to draw a false conclusion of the whole doctrine.

The last consideration that the reader must be aware of is that Soviet books on tactics force the author to study and present a comprehensive doctrine, with each part fitting in smoothly to the whole, while the authors of separate articles have no such requirement. Therefore, what is presented by a periodical on the meeting engagement, for example, may not mesh smoothly with an article on the attack. These apparent inconsistencies might cause the Western reader to assume that there is no well defined and comprehensive tactical doctrine. This must be avoided and can be if the Western student is mindful of this qualification.

These qualifiers, however, do not detract from the usefulness of the methodology. The great strength of this system of analysis lies in presenting a diversified picture to the analyst, which more accurately reflects current events, problems and trends occurring in the troop units of the Soviet army. And it is units at this level which make the doctrine of Soviet tactics work on the battlefield.

Meeting Engagement

Defense Intelligence Report (DIR) Soviet Tactics; The Meeting Engagement defines the meeting engagement as combat between opposing columns of rapidly advancing troops on a convergent axis of advance. This condition will most likely take place under the following circumstances. At the outbreak of hostilities, when the enemy is moving to his defensive positions and has been surprised by the Soviet attack. The second circumstance stems from a successful Soviet breakthrough of the enemy's defenses, the enemy's tactical reserves will become involved with the Soviet breakthrough forces as the enemy counterattacks. Third, after the Soviets have succeeded in a penetration of the enemy's front line defenses, and are fighting in the depths of the enemy's defenses, Soviet commanders expect that meeting engagements will take place between their forces and the enemy forces, which are being deployed into blocking positions. Fourth, meeting engagements will take place between Soviet and enemy units which are withdrawing. In the defense the Soviets expect a meeting engagement to take place between Soviet counterattacking units and the enemy after the enemy's main axis of advance has been identified.

Soviet Tactics; The Meeting Engagement, continues with an explanation of the organization of the Soviet forces for the meeting engagement. The report states that meeting engagements are conducted at battalion, regimental and division level.¹

This report describes the formation of the Soviet unit in the meeting engagement as composed of an advance guard, main body, reserve and a flank guard and a rear security detachment. The advance guard is composed of approximately one-third of the unit's strength and has the mission of insuring an unobstructed advance of the main body. It will form the base of maneuver for the main body when it encounters enemy forces which it cannot overwhelm. The main body, in the maneuver preceeding the meeting engagement, may advance on several separate routes, and the unit may be committed piecemeal in the event of contact with the enemy. The essential requirement for this operation is speed. The reserve element, in a combined arms force, usually contains no tanks, but is composed of anti-tank means. The rear and flank security elements preform the functions which their name implies, and can be of equal strength to that of the advance guard.

DIR, The Soviet Motorized Rifle Company, adds that the motorized rifle company (MRC) in the role of the advance guard, attempts to destroy enemy security elements and continue the advance; if, however, the enemy force is too strong, then the company takes up defensive positions from which it can gain time for the main body to deploy. The MRC as part of the main body will deploy under the direction of the battalion commander. Every effort will be made to attack the flank of the enemy. The normal procedure is for the

company to deploy into a line formation, led by attached tanks, and attempt to attack the flank of the enemy. If however, the battalion is unable to overcome the enemy, it will fix him in order to allow higher echelons to maneuver.

US Army publications agree that the deployment and attack procedures, outlined above, are the Soviet method of battle for the meeting engagement. A small exception is found in DIR, Soviet Tank Company Tactics. This publication states that the commander deploys into combat formation when encountering the enemy, and attempts to attack either the front or the flank of the enemy.²

As the term implies, the Soviets view the meeting engagement as an extremely fluid tactical maneuver. The uncertainty of the situation means that the need for reconnaissance is crucial. The battalion, whose mission is the advance guard, will dispatch reconnaissance patrol ahead of its line of march to provide the commander with the necessary intelligence to make a decision on deployment for combat of the advance guard.³ The decision to deploy is treated only in general terms in most of the Soviet periodical literature. Therefore no firm conclusion can be deduced about the size of the opposing force which will cause a deployment. The Soviets feel that this decision depends upon many factors besides the size of the enemy force, such as the degree of resistance, the threat which is presented to the advance of the main body, and the type of weapons that the enemy force is using. However, some articles do suggest a force ratio which will cause the advance guard to deploy. In the case where the advance guard in the meeting engagement was a battalion, an enemy force in company strength caused it to deploy and maneuver.⁴ In another case, the decision of the company commander of the advance party was criticized because he ordered into battle a platoon against an enemy reconnaissance group, which would have abandoned the route of march of the main body in any case.⁵ The force ratio causing deployment in the two examples above suggests that deployment against the threat will occur only if the advance of the main unit could be hindered. The decision to deploy and maneuver against the enemy rests with the commander of the advance guard, and will hinge upon his estimation that the "enemy's main force", that is a force which will prevent him from completing his mission, is at hand.⁶

Normally, Soviet forces involved in the meeting engagement will be a combined arms team consisting of infantry, tank, artillery, engineer, and chemical subunits. The importance of the artillery must be stressed, as its fires are quickly employed to cover the maneuver of the tank and infantry subunits, and to disrupt the enemy's deployment and fire upon friendly forces. This achieves the qualities that the Soviets strive for in the meeting engagement: swiftness and initiative.⁷ The tanks of the combined arms unit usually lead the formation, with the artillery closely behind, as this gives the unit the greatest freedom of maneuver and allows for responsive artillery fires.⁸

During the maneuver phase of the meeting engagement, a Soviet commander generally uses approximately one-third of the unit to form a blocking position, while the other two-thirds of the unit makes a flank attack upon the enemy. Soviet military writers caution against the indiscriminate use of the deep envelopment as a flanking maneuver, as this leaves the flanks of the attacking unit open to attacks itself. The gaps which occur because of the deep envelopment must be covered by a large portion of the unit's combat strength, thus detracting from the force available for the flanking maneuver.⁹

While the flank attack is the preferred method for achieving success in the meeting engagement, namely the "break up of the approaching (enemy) column, followed with the destruction (of the enemy unit) piecemeal",¹⁰ there can arise the occasion for the use of a frontal attack. Frontal attacks should be considered if the element of surprise has been lost from the flank attack, or time and terrain constraints exist that make the flank attack impractical.

Two courses of action can occur as a result of a successful meeting engagement. If the enemy begins to withdraw from the battle and has no overwhelming combat strength due to arrive soon, then the Soviet unit will continue the pursuit in order to destroy the enemy's artillery positions, and prevent him from consolidating on a defense line. On the other hand, if the arrival of a stronger enemy force is imminent, then the unit assumes a defensive position, acting as the blocking force for the next higher echelon, which continues the movements as described in the preceding paragraphs.

The positions of the US writers on the subject of the meeting engagement is substantially correct. As a composite, they give a better view of the operation than when taken singly. However, two points of the operation need to be emphasized to a greater degree than presently found in US publications. First, the importance of reconnaissance to the maneuver and deployment phase of the engagement should receive more detailed study. In order for the Soviets to successfully conduct the meeting engagement, thorough reconnaissance is essential, because the Soviets depend upon reconnaissance for the decision to deploy the advance guard. Unnecessary deployments delay the advance of the main force, but delayed deployments against superior forces may lose for the Soviet unit the surprise and speed on which the successful meeting engagement depends. The Soviet writers understand this and consequently forward reconnaissance is emphasized. Secondly, the use of artillery in the meeting engagement appears of far greater importance in Soviet publications, than in US Army publications. The Soviet writings continually stress the importance of the artillery's role in screening the open flanks, covering the maneuver of friendly forces and disorienting the opposing forces.

Attack

United States Army publications vary widely on the concept of the attack. They even use different terms to describe this movement. TC 30-4, The Motorized Rifle Regiment, TC 30-102, The Motorized Rifle Company, and DIR, Soviet Tank Battalion Tactics, refer to this operation as the attack, while DIR, Soviet Tank Company Tactics and DIR, The Soviet Motorized Rifle Company, refer to the operation as the breakthrough.

These publications also disagree on echelons within Soviet units. TC 30-4 and TC 30-102 state that echelons are not used beneath regimental level, but Soviet Tank Company Tactics and The Soviet Motorized Rifle Company both refer to a battalion having a second echelon. The Soviet Motorized Rifle Company is not as definite about the size of the second echelon, and refers to this second echelon as the reserve element. Soviet Tank Battalion Tactics makes specific comments about the existence of a second echelon at battalion:

"A battalion may attack in either one or two echelons. The second echelon, usually one tank company, follows the first echelon at a distance of three kilometers. If the first echelon fails to reach its objective, the mission is taken over as a priority task of the second echelon... The second echelon is frequently - but inaccurately - referred to in Soviet military writing as a 'reserve'. The true reserve (usually one tank platoon) is formed by the battalion commander."¹¹

Whether this is a semantical problem among the authors or whether there is a more specific reason for this problem of definition is not revealed in their discussions.

There also exists incongruity on the question of unit frontages in the attack. TC 30-4 gives the battalion frontage as one and one half to two kilometers in width. Soviet Tank Battalion Tactics states that the battalion occupies a front of one to one and a half kilometers under conventional conditions and a two kilometer front under nuclear conditions. These two publications agree with The Soviet Motorized Rifle Company, which states that a motorized rifle company attacks on a 500-800 meter width, depending upon the employment of nuclear weapons. Only Soviet Tank Battalion Tactics gives the depth of the attacking company as being three to four kilometers.

These publications all recognize two types of Soviet attacks: attacks against a prepared position and attacks against a hasty defense. Attacks may be made from the march against hasty defensive positions according to Soviet Tank Battalion Tactics and Soviet Tank Company Tactics, but The Soviet Motorized Rifle Company states that attacks from the march may be made against prepared

positions, as well.

There exists some disagreement among the authors concerning the deployment of Soviet units in the attack. In attacking a hasty defense, all agree that it will be made from the march, and will attempt to catch the enemy off guard by the swiftness and aggressiveness of the operation.

The disagreements referred to above can be seen in the following publications. TC 30-4, TC 30-102, and The Soviet Motorized Rifle Company do not indicate the likely deployment distances from the objective of Soviet units. Soviet Tank Battalion Tactics and Soviet Tank Company Tactics give specific kilometer distances from the objective for deployment, but disagree on what those distances are. Soviet Tank Battalion Tactics states that the Soviet battalion starts its advance from a point at the front of the battalion deployment area, an area out of enemy observation, which has good cover and camouflage, and moves along well defined routes until the companies reach a point four to six kilometers from the enemy positions. At this point, the companies deploy into company columns and continue in these formations until they reach a point one to three kilometers from the enemy, at which time the companies deploy into platoon columns. The platoons form an assault line approximately 500 to 1000 meters before the objective. Soviet Tank Company Tactics gives the deployment into company columns as occurring five kilometers from the objective, and deployment into platoon columns two kilometers before the objective. According to the latter publication, the platoons form an assault line 500 meters from the objective.

In the assault phase of the attack, all the publications agree that tanks will lead the infantry, and that the infantry will attempt to stay mounted. The assault phase will be preceded by a heavy artillery preparation, which will be shifted to the depths of the enemy's defenses when the lead elements of the assault are within 100 to 150 meters of the objective. There is a small variance between the authors as to how far the tanks will be in front of the armored infantry carriers. The figure varies from 150 to 500 meters.

In overcoming obstacles, such as mines and anti-tank ditches, there exists a significant difference between Soviet Tank Company Tactics and The Soviet Motorized Rifle Company. The latter states:

"Should the tanks be held up by obstacles or barriers, they support the attacking infantry with fire. The infantry and the attached engineers clear the barriers and support the advance of the tanks."¹²

In contrast, Soviet Tank Company Tactics states, "If there are no gaps in the minefields and the mine ploughs are not available, the (tank) company advances through the minefield in precombat formation."¹³

Comparing these publications with regard to the actions of the Soviet unit after capturing the objective is difficult because they do not all use the same terms to differentiate between attacking the objective and seizing the objective. However, for ease of discussion, it is assumed that whether the publication says driving the enemy from the defensive position or capturing the objective, the intent is to depict accomplishment of the operation in question. Soviet Tank Battalion Tactics finds that the Soviet first echelon unit consolidates on the objective and the second echelon exploits the success. However, Soviet Tank Company Tactics states that after overrunning the enemy's defensive positions, the unit commander orders the unit to continue the attack. The Soviet Motorized Rifle Company concurs with the latter publication in stating that the commander attempts to maintain the momentum of the attack after his unit captures the enemy's defensive positions.

US publications spend a large portion of their space on depicting typical frontages for the Soviet units. Soviet periodical literature does not mention the size of company frontages, but that does not mean that there is no clue as to the size of the Soviet unit which an American unit could expect to face. In the literature for 1977 and 1978 there are several references to the size of units which the Soviets expect to face with their companies and battalions. Insufficient data exists to make more than tentative conclusions, but these conclusions do tend to support current US expectations. In two different articles a Soviet combined arms battalion estimated that the positions it was attacking were defended by the equivalent of a company to a company and a half of US mechanized infantry.¹⁴ In another case, a Soviet company supported by engineers attacked positions defended by up to the equivalent of an American company.¹⁵

Soviet periodical publications do stress that an accurate estimate of the enemy situation must be accomplished, and that it is a prerequisite for success. The Soviet commander should attempt to construct in his own mind the deployment of the enemy on the forward edge of the battle area and, very importantly, the likely locations of the enemy's reserve and artillery positions.¹⁶ Without this information an attack will probably fail, and Soviet field grade officers are very critical of such failures, as can be seen from the following quote:

"Twice the company attacked the positions of the 'enemy' and each time without success. Lieutenant K. Sviridov... (acted) without taking into account the fire and maneuver possibilities of his unit. He did not even try to discover the fire system of the 'enemy'... In one word the company expended its forces in vain..."¹⁷

The solution for such waste in the Soviet army is the reliance upon timely and complete reconnaissance. Very few articles are complete without reference to the reconnaissance element and its

use. The composition of Soviet reconnaissance elements vary, but consistently are a large portion of the unit's combat power. A battalion will send an entire infantry platoon¹⁸ and a platoon will dispatch up to a squad on a reconnaissance mission.¹⁹ In addition to collecting information on the enemy disposition, the reconnaissance element in the attack is expected to concentrate its reconnaissance on possible avenues of enemy counterattack.²⁰ Another article praised a company commander for selecting a flanking maneuver to attack the enemy, but criticized his failure to use the reconnaissance element correctly, which made his attack fail. His failure lay in not keeping himself sufficiently informed as to the enemy's dispositions. When he chose the flanking attack, he selected the wrong flank to assault. The enemy had just completed moving up reinforcements to that flank. His assault failed because he had not made proper use of the reconnaissance element.²¹

The Soviets habitually make use of combined arms in their attacking units. The motorized rifle battalion will typically have a tank company, an artillery battalion, an engineer platoon, and a chemical/radiological squad and a mortar platoon only. In some instances elements of less than a platoon will be attached to a platoon of another arm of the service. An example of this was found in an article in which a tank platoon had less than a full platoon of infantry working with it.²³

The Soviets vary their formations in the attack to meet the tactical situation. The one constant seems to be the deployment of the battalion in one echelon, but with the provision that there will be a reserve at battalion level. In the periodical literature, the size of the reserve frequently varies. In one case the battalion held only one platoon in reserve,²⁴ while in another the battalion kept an entire company in reserve.²⁵ Making use of only the periodical literature it is difficult to establish the difference between a reserve and a second echelon unit. They seem to have similar functions, yet the Soviets clearly think of them as quite different. For instance, one article described the function of the reserve as repulsing enemy counterattacks.²⁶ However, in another article this function was ascribed to both the reserve and the second echelon units. But the second echelon unit had the additional commitment of maintaining the tempo of the advance by maneuvering around the flanks and between the gaps of the first echelon units in order to attack the gaps in the enemy's defense.

The question of the proper deployment of the unit and the guiding principles are clearly revealed in the periodicals. The terrain dictates the point of deployment,²⁷ but in order to maintain the desired rate of advance and to catch the enemy off guard, the attack should, whenever possible, be made from the march.²⁸ In order to assure success, the combined arms team is necessary,²⁹ because the enemy's defense possesses the types and quantities of weapons to destroy either infantry type units or tank units, if these formations are employed singly.³⁰

The heavy reliance of the Soviets on artillery continues even today. The early and massive use of artillery fire power is a conspicuous aspect of the Soviet attack. Deployment for the attack occurs under the covering fire of the artillery.³¹ The fires of the artillery are utilized to effect confusion in the enemy's defensive positions and to provide covering fire under which Soviet units may maneuver.

The periodicals stressed that the high tempo of the advance must be maintained. Tank and BMP units must not get bogged down in long fights with enemy strong points. These first echelon units must move expeditiously to uncover and attack the enemy's reserves and artillery positions.³² The concept that the Soviets will not maneuver, but will continue to pursue unprofitable directions of advance must be discarded. The Soviets state that if units become bogged down along primary avenues of advance then the attack should be shifted to an alternate axis of advance.³³

The maintenance of the tempo of the attack is also achieved by the infantry remaining mounted during the attack. The Soviets feel that the speed of the BMP gives the infantry this possibility.³⁴ The mounted infantry indicate targets to the supporting tanks by firing machine gun bursts from the BMPs toward likely targets.³⁵

This manner of using the infantry should not be considered the only way that Soviet infantry will be deployed. A great many articles are devoted to the correct employment of the BMP-mounted infantry, however, there exist opinions that the infantry should attack dismounted. These writers state that the terrain and the enemy defense will determine the correct deployment of the infantry.³⁶ In one critique of a tactical exercise, the company commander was subjected to severe criticism because the company made a mounted attack against positions equipped with antitank guided missiles, resulting in heavy losses of both personnel and equipment. The company made the same attack dismounted and the attack was successful.³⁷

The Soviets discuss the mechanics for conducting the dismounted attack, but as noted below they still have not completely mastered the full utilization of all the weapons systems available to the dismounted infantry team. The BMP, following the tanks in the attack, will accelerate while the tanks slow down, allowing the BMPs to draw even with the tanks. The infantry then dismount and form a skirmish line behind the tanks, while the BMPs fall further behind the dismounted infantry.³⁸ This may create a condition in which the infantrymen either mask the fires of the BMPs or become endangered by their fires.

While the problem of the dismounted infantry being endangered by the fires from the following BMPs may seem serious to the Western reader, that level of danger may well be acceptable to the

Soviet commander. A statement made in one periodical should alert the Western reader to the level of danger to which the Soviet commander is willing to expose his troops in order to maintain the rapid tempo of the advance. While discussing crossing obstacles, this writer made the statement that units will have to cross contaminated areas without waiting for the levels of radiation to drop to a safe reading.⁴⁰

The old Tsarist army and the Soviet army in the past relied upon mass formations and the frontal attack. Although not a very sophisticated maneuver it was successful for them. Currently there appears to be some debate within the military as to whether the frontal attack is still possible. Most of the articles under review indicated that the flank attack and the envelopment were the maneuvers which would be successful. Two articles state categorically that the frontal attack was out of the question.⁴¹ In one article the author took exception to those officers in the Soviet army today who feel that there is a place for the frontal attack in Soviet army tactics. After making a very strong case against the frontal attack, the same writer stated that there could be a use for the frontal attack under nuclear conditions.⁴² There is inadequate evidence of such a debate to come to a firm conclusion about its seriousness, but it apparently exists.

On the whole, the Soviet objective in tactical maneuvering seems to be simultaneous attacks on the flanks and rear of the enemy.⁴³ These flank attacks will take advantage of the gaps found in the enemy's combat formations.⁴⁴ In attempting to disorient the the enemy as to their real intentions the Soviets will use part of their unit to screen the front, while the main attack is directed against the flank. There appears to be no firm rule about the size of the screening force used to deceive the enemy. In one case a squad was used to demonstrate in front of the enemy's defensive position, while the main force, a company, maneuvered for the flank blow.⁴⁵ On the other hand, in one company attack a platoon was dispatched to make the flank attack, while the remainder of the company attacked the front of the defensive position.⁴⁶

Maneuvering to repulse a counterattack will not necessarily interfere with the continued attack of the main Soviet force on the objective. In both repulsing the counterattack and pursuing the defeated enemy, the emphasis is upon maintaining the tempo of the advance. In one company attack, the Soviet company received a counterblow by an enemy mechanized infantry platoon, supported by tanks. Even though this force was a serious threat to the Soviet company, the commander left only one platoon in place to repulse the attack, while the company continued the advance.⁴⁷ The tempo of the advance is also maintained by pursuing the enemy quickly after it has been dislodged from the defensive position.⁴⁸

There is a difference when comparing American and Soviet literature dealing with the attack, but the magnitude or seriousness of

the difference is connected more with emphasis than with content. The American publications mention the principles that the Soviets cover, but lack the proper emphasis upon those areas that are critical for understanding the Soviet attack.

The three areas in which there is the greatest difference are: the interval between units in the attack, the importance of reconnaissance, and the flexibility of maneuver.

A large portion of the American description of the Soviet attack concerns the interval between units. This is simply overemphasized. It could lead an American officer to conclude that the Soviets view the battle as a set piece battlefield. Soviet periodicals do not refer to precise distances between units in the attack, rather the point is made that the terrain and enemy will dictate how and what formation the commander will use. This situation is reminiscent of the US Army service school publications of the 1960s, under which a generation of US officers were taught. These officers, after completing their service schools, arrived at their units thinking that combat formations learned in the classroom with such exactitude could be applied with real troops in various field conditions. In a very short time they found that regulation distances between units and formations simply didn't exist. The very same lesson should be applied to Soviet formations; and this point is made in Soviet periodicals. The Soviet formation is flexible and the distances vary - this is the lesson that US officers should learn.

Another significant difference in the emphasis between the American and Soviet description of the attack, is the use of reconnaissance. American publications certainly mention Soviet reconnaissance, but the Soviet periodicals depicting the attack imply that the reconnaissance phase is extremely important. The American commander and soldier must be aware of the importance that the Soviets attach to this, in order to take the correct steps to confuse the reconnaissance element and thereby foil the attack. Reconnaissance precedes the Soviet main formation and can be used as an indicator of Soviet intentions. Based upon the information that the Soviet commander receives from this element, his decisions are made. With judicious use of deception, this can be turned against him.

Lastly, American publications are not as illuminating on the flexibility of Soviet maneuver as a reading of their periodicals warrants. The Soviet army will strike the most vulnerable point of the defender's position, which will be identified by extensive use of reconnaissance. If the attack is failing, it can and will be shifted to a more profitable axis of advance. The Soviets avoid long preparation time when attacking and will, whenever possible, strike the enemy upon first contact, even to the extent of committing piecemeal their forces into battle.

Defense

All US military publications used in this paper agree in their definition of the Soviet defense. They all emphasize that it is a transitional phase designed to repel the attack of superior enemy forces, thus creating favorable conditions for a return to the primary maneuver, the attack.

The composition of the Soviet defense forces was not described in detail except in Soviet Tank Battalion Tactics. This publication states that the tank battalion will be reinforced with a motorized rifle company, an engineer platoon, an artillery battalion, a mortar company, and a chemical defense element. With the further exception of Soviet Tank Company Tactics, which stated that a motorized rifle battalion would have a tank company, the other publications only mentioned the increase in antitank means in the defensive forces.

The Soviet Motorized Rifle Company states that the Soviets make no clear distinction between the static and the mobile defense. Whether a defense is static or mobile depends to a large degree upon the size of the unit. The larger the unit the greater the flexibility it possesses in the defense. At battalion level and below there is very little flexibility. TC 30-4 and TC 30-102, both of which deal mostly with subunits battalion and below, agree with The Soviet Motorized Rifle Company that the most likely defense that the US commander should expect to encounter is the area defense. The deployment of the Soviet battalion can be somewhat confusing if one reads The Soviet Motorized Rifle Company and Soviet Tank Battalion Tactics, unless the reader remembers that the two publications are dealing with different types of units. The Soviet Motorized Rifle Company states that the Soviet battalion deploys in two echelons, with a platoon-size reserve. There is obviously a difference in the size of the second echelon that the two publications present, but the functions of these subunits appear to be basically the same. Soviet Tank Company Tactics states that the normal deployment of the company is two platoons in front and one further back. The Soviet Motorized Rifle Company describes the company formation as as either two up and one back, or one up and two back, depending upon the terrain and the number of avenues of approach. In the deployment phase there is little difference between the two publications and the theories of defense described are similar to those of most Western armies.

The length of the frontage of a Soviet unit occupies an important part of US publications' discussion of the defense, just as it did in the offense. The two publications on tanks vary little on the length of frontages. Both state that the company occupies approximately a one kilometer front. The publication on the

infantry in the defense states that the battalion will have a front of about two and a half kilometers, which when broken down into the usual deployment gives each company about a kilometer of frontage. TC 30-102 gives a slightly larger front for the company of up to 1500 meters.

According to both publications on tank tactics, when tank units occupy a section of the defense, they are dug in on the reverse slope along with the fighting vehicles of the attached infantry. Soviet Tank Battalion Tactics states that the areas which are not covered by direct fire weapons are covered by indirect fire means. This publication also states that the infantry attached to the tank units will dig their positions two hundred meters in front of the emplaced tanks. Both of the tank publications state that an attempt is made to separate the attacking infantry from the attacking tanks by use of machine gun and artillery fire.

Two of the publications, Soviet Tank Company Tactics and The Soviet Motorized Rifle Company, describe how the defense repulses enemy reconnaissance and probes of the defense. In the case of the tank units, a "wandering tank" is designated. This tank has the responsibility to fire on probes and by shifting its location frequently, to confuse the enemy as to the unit's strength and placement. In the infantry units, only certain weapons are permitted to fire, thus achieving the same objectives as the "wandering tank".

The responsibility for repelling penetrations of the defense lies primarily with the battalion. If, however, the penetration can not be repelled by the battalion with its own resources, then the second echelon of the regiment will assume this duty. During all penetrations, the personnel and equipment of the unit remain in place to assist the counterattacking units by firing on the enemy. Units do not counterattack penetrations of adjacent positions. But if their sector of responsibility is not under pressure, then the unit's firepower will be directed to the adjacent unit's sector.

Soviet Tank Company Tactics makes several statements which are unique, but of merit. The enemy forces making the main attack are engaged by the defenders at approximately 500 meters, which is the beginning of the company's area of responsibility. When a tank company is attached to a motorized rifle battalion, one platoon is assigned to each company as anti-tank protection. The company commander of the tank company retains the right to maneuver individual tanks in order to fully utilize their potential, but does not have the authority to maneuver platoons.

The Soviet Motorized Rifle Company also sheds light on particular aspects of the infantry defense. During the enemy

artillery preparation, all personnel take cover in bunkers except machine gunners and observers. The infantry must make careful use of the terrain and employ extensive minefields to cover likely avenues of armor approach. The infantry will make use of extensive trench systems, which are interconnected in strong points.

There are no important differences between the various American descriptions of the Soviet defense. Basically, the defense is described as a strong point defensive system, with heavy reliance upon anti-tank means and elaborately prepared emplacements. At small unit level, there exists almost no flexibility, with what can be described as a stand and die philosophy.

The traditional American attitude has been that the Soviets do not consider the defense important. While it cannot be debated that the Soviets consider the offense as the most important form of maneuver, it would be misleading to dismiss the defense entirely. As a Soviet writer states: "Even now the defense is one of the most important forms of combat actions, employed with the aim of disrupting or repulsing an enemy attack, dealing him defeat, holding positions occupied, and thus creating conditions for moving into the offense."⁴⁹ Soviet defensive tactics, as described by the American literature, has some of the greatest inconsistencies, when compared with Soviet periodicals. However, it should be noted that this form of maneuver has the fewest articles, in Soviet literature, of the two years examined.

As in the offense, the Soviets tend to employ a combined arms team in the defense.⁵⁰ In organizing the defense, "each officer above all strives to insure its high stability in anti-tank, anti-artillery and air defense aspect."⁵¹ This is achieved by echelonning the units. One Soviet writer admitted that while an echelonned defense is not the only way to stop the enemy, it is the best method available at this time.⁵²

The question of what qualifies as an echelon occurs again in the defense, as it did in the offense. In three articles, the battalion was organized with two echelons, two companies up and one company back, the whole of the battalion forming a large 'U' shape.⁵³ In another article, the writer states that the battalion was formed in one echelon with a reserve in the rear.⁵⁴ It appears that in a schematic both formations would look the same.

In one of the above formations, the battalion occupied a unique posture. While the two forward companies were employed normally, with an additional tank platoon each, the company in the rear was employed without a tank platoon. The third tank platoon of the tank company was employed as an ambush platoon within the battalion defense system. The third tank platoon was employed slightly behind the right front company, but slightly ahead and to the right of the rear company, along the most likely avenue or armor approach.⁵⁵ This is the only example of

such a formation in the reviewed literature.

The company positions are based on the strong point method, with the infantry occupying individual foxholes.⁵⁶ Outposts for observation are located on the forward edge of the hills,⁵⁷ while the infantry vehicles are emplaced on the reverse side of the hills.⁵⁸ Minefields are laid both in front of the positions and in the depth of the defense.⁵⁹ Reinforcements of depleted positions were mentioned in only one short article. This article mentioned that after a nuclear blow, defensive positions were reinforced.⁶⁰

A final word on Soviet organization for the defense taken from a Soviet article sums up the flexibility afforded the commander in using the terrain to develop his defensive formation, rather than requiring him to follow some inflexible text-book formula. When the terrain to be defended is a narrow valley, the companies should be dispersed to create a pocket or killing zone. But when a defensive position has an open flank, the companies will be echeloned left or right. Defending an open terrain, such as a plateau, the companies will be in a linear formation, while defending a mountain pass the battalion will defend in depth.⁶¹

Soviet periodicals state that enemy probes should be engaged by specific weapons within the units to prevent disclosing the remainder of the positions prematurely.⁶² But during the main attack, the enemy will be engaged at the far edge of the defender's responsibility, with all the unit's weapons.⁶³

Very little information was contained in the periodical literature about the size of the enemy force the Soviets expect their units to engage. Two references to the expected size were found. One stated that a motorized rifle company engaged up to two platoons of infantry supported by five tanks. The other reference described a motorized rifle infantry battalion attacked by thirty-seven tanks and four companies of infantry.⁶⁴

The Soviets plan to counterattack when the momentum of the enemy has been halted, and the enemy has begun to move up its reserves. Tank and motorized infantry units form the basis of counterattacking forces. Most of the articles agree on these two points, but disagree on which units will participate in the counterattack. One article states that companies of the second echelon are the ones that counterattack the penetrations to restore the defense,⁶⁵ while another article maintains:

"As a rule, a first echelon battalion will carry out the counterattack along with the second echelon of the regiment or in conjunction with neighboring sub-units. Only when comparatively small enemy forces have penetrated into the defense, sustaining losses

as a result, will the battalion counterattack independently with its second echelon or reserve. In such a case the counterattacking group must be strengthened as much as possible from subunits which are in non-attacked sectors."⁶⁶

Another article agrees with the latter, stating that companies which have been penetrated will participate in counterattacking the enemy units.⁶⁷ The counterattack, therefore, can be considered the responsibility of both the front-line units and those units controlled by higher headquarters.

The same flexibility found in other Soviet combat formations is found in the defense. There apparently exists a set of guidelines for the Soviet commander to follow, but they are very dependent upon terrain and the enemy.

US and Soviet sources which were used disagree on several points. US publications state that Soviet units in contact or those which have been penetrated do not participate in the counterattack in conjunction with higher units. However, Soviet periodicals describe defending units making both coordinated and independent counterattacks.

Another area of disagreement about counterattacks concerns the employment of adjacent units in the counterattack. US sources maintain that adjacent units hold their position in the event of a penetration of another unit, but a Soviet publication states:

"If subunits from non-attacked directions of approach are assigned to counterattack, the battalion commander must take a variety of measures to cover the exposed area. In one case he may limit it to surveillance and security forces..., and in another use roving fire units and if possible, take minelaying measures."⁶⁸

In the three areas of Soviet tactical doctrine which were reviewed in this paper, the greatest divergence between Soviet and US sources was found in the section dealing with defense.

Conclusion

This study has led to the conclusion that US Army publications are substantially correct in their reporting of Soviet Army tactical doctrine. There are several areas, however, which either need more emphasis or are not in accord with Soviet periodical literature at least for the years 1977 and 1978.

In the description of the meeting engagement, US writings need to state more emphatically the importance of the reconnaissance element, and the role of the artillery. In describing the meeting engagement, US publications do not give a clear impression of the importance of the role of reconnaissance in the attack. While not enough space is devoted to reconnaissance, entirely too much attention is devoted to describing exact intervals between units. This fault is very difficult to understand, for the Soviet periodical literature is virtually devoid of descriptions of the interval between units. The product of this fault is a misimpression of the flexibility of Soviet tactics. The reader could well draw the conclusion that the Soviet commander will employ set piece formations on future battlefields, if his only access to understanding Soviet tactics is US Army publications. This impression is quite the opposite to that which is gained from reading Soviet periodical literature. The Soviet commander is given guidelines within which he should maneuver his unit, but the situation will dictate the employment of a particular formation. The emphasis in the periodical literature is on the commander choosing the correct formation, after a thorough evaluation, and then adapting that formation to meet the requirements of terrain, enemy forces and fire means, and his mission in that particular situation.

In the depiction of the attack and the meeting engagement, US publications lack emphasis, but in the description of the defense these publications differ significantly with the Soviet publications which were reviewed. Unlike what the US publications tell the US commander, he should expect that the Soviet unit which his force has penetrated, will participate in the counterattack. This counterattack can be made independently or in coordination with second echelon units. Nor should the US commander expect that adjacent units, to the one his forces have penetrated, will remain in place. These adjacent units could well join in the counterattack effort.

The main objective of this paper has been addressed, but what of the ancillary areas of the study? Does the literature address itself to the Soviet junior officer or to a wider readership? The situations that are presented are instructive to the officer at battalion level and below, and do seem to pass to him the thinking of the higher levels. It would be shortsighted to presume that the Soviets would publish these periodicals to pass

false information to Western intelligence services, because of the confusion that it could create in their own ranks. But that does not necessarily mean that it is instructive to the US analyst in determining the course of Soviet tactics. If the analyst has access to documents from higher levels of the Soviet army on the trends in tactical development, he should rely upon those. But to ignore the literature addressed to the junior officer would be dangerous, for this literature reflects the current conditions in the lower levels of the Soviet Army. It addresses those problems which occupy the minds of the practioners of Soviet tactics, and no matter how fast the higher levels would like to institute change, it ultimately rests upon those officers, which this literature addresses, to apply those changes.

Footnotes

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3. Colonel Shakin, "Taktika-Stroevoe Zanyatiya Po Upravleniyu Ognem", Voyennyy Vestnik, No. 3 (1977), pp. 96 & 97

4. Colonel I. Proskurin, "Vo Vstrechnom Boyu", Voyennyy Vestnik, No. 4 (1977), p. 65

5. Ibid., p. 61

6. Shakin, p. 97

7. Proskurin, p. 64

8. Ibid., p. 65

9. Ibid., p. 67

10. Ibid., p. 65

11. Major A.E. Hemesley, "Soviet Tank Battalion Tactics", Defense Intelligence Report, DDI 1120-10-77, Washington, DC, Defense Intelligence Agency, 1977, p. 18

12. Major Robert Frasche, The Soviet Motorized Rifle Company, Defense Intelligence Report, DDI 1100-77-76, Washington, DC, Defense Intelligence Agency, 1975, p. 73

13. Hemesley, Soviet Tank Company Tactics, p. 36

14. Major G. Mukhamedzhanov, "Nastupleniye v Glubine Oborony" Voyennyy Vestnik, No. 5 (1977), p. 48, see also Colonel V. Gamaliy, "Batal'on na Uchenii s Boevoy Strel'boy", Voyennyy Vestnik, No. 8 (1977), p. 56

15. General Major S. Kovachev, "V Obkhodyashchem Otryade", Voyennyy Vestnik, No. 8 (1977), p. 116

16. Gamaliy, p. 57

17. Colonel V. Savel'ev, Krasnaya Zvezda, (Moscow), 24 April 1976, No. 96, p. 2

18. Gamaliy, p. 58
19. Kovachev, p. 116 and Mukhamedzhanov, p. 47 and p. 50
20. Mukhamedzhanov, p. 47 and p. 50
21. Kovachev, p. 117
22. Gamiliy, p. 56
23. Colonel P. Sidorov, "V Tesnom Vzaimodeystvii", Znamenosets, (Moscow), No. 7 (1978), p. 10
24. Mukhamedzhanov, p. 48
25. Gamaliy, p. 58
26. Ibid., p. 59
27. Lt. M. Boltunov, "Umelyy Manevr", Krasnaya Zvezda, (Moscow), No. 197, 26 August 1978, p. 1
28. Lt. V. Volkov, "Rastet Mastirstvo Tankistov", Krasnaya Zvezda, (Moscow), No. 203, 2 September 1978, p. 1
29. Mukhamedzhanov, p. 46
30. Sidorov, p. 11
31. Gamaliy, p. 58
32. Colonel P. Semchenkov, "Manevr-Klyuch k Pobede", Voyenny Vestnik. No. 4 (1977), p. 71
33. Ibid.
34. Mukhamedzhanov, p. 47
35. A. Ziyatov, "Atakuet Ognemetnyy Tank", Znamenosets, No. 9 (1978), p. 23
36. Mukhamedzhanov, p. 47
37. Ibid., p. 49
38. Colonel E. Gunyavii, "Kogda Obstanovka Izmenilas", Znamenosets No. 1 (1978), p. 8
39. Sidorov, p. 10
40. Semchinkov, p. 70

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42. Semchinkov, p. 70
43. Boltunov, and General Lieutenant P. Gyr'ev, "Boevaya Aktivnost' Serzhanta", Znamenosets, No. 10 (1978), p. 9
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45. Kovachev, p. 117
46. Major E. Belyaev, "Ataka v Gorakh", Krasnaya Zvezda, No. 196, 24 August 1978, p. 2
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50. Colonel I. Velenets, "Assuming the Defense During an Advance", Soviet Military Review, (Moscow), No. 1, January 1977, p. 15
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56. Boreskev, p. 65
57. Averyanov, p. 25
58. "Konkurs'Ogon' Taktika, 78", Znamenosets, No. 6 (1978), p. 10
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60. Captain E. Trukshen, "Posle' Yadernogo' Uudara", Krasnaya Zvezda, No. 204, 3 September 1978, p. 1

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62. LTC E. Tokranov, "Motostrelkovyy Vzvod v Oborone Noch'yu" Voyennyy Vestnik, No. 5, (1978), p. 51
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